Report raises new questions in King assassination case

By LES PAYNE
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The recent Justice Department report on the assassination of Martin Luther King has raised new questions about the case and intensified the call for an investigation by a body independent of federal law enforcement officials.

Members of the House committee investigating King's death say that the Justice report shows no signs of any real investigation of the murder or of the possibility that James Earl Ray was part of a conspiracy. The House Select Committee on Assassinations, which is investigating the murders of President Kennedy and King, is in disarray following heated confrontation between the committee's chairman, Rep. Henry Gonzalez, D-Tex., and the chief counsel, former Philadelphia prosecutor Richard Sprague.

THE 200-PAGE report of the Justice task force reaches no conclusion about a possible conspiracy in the death of King. Former Atty. Gen. Edward Levi told the task force to determine whether the FBI's surveillance of King influenced its investigation and whether the bureau's action had any "adverse effect on Dr. King." The report concluded that the bureau had conducted a "thorough investigation," although its "harassment of Dr. King and efforts to drive him out of the civil rights movement were found to have been clearly improper."

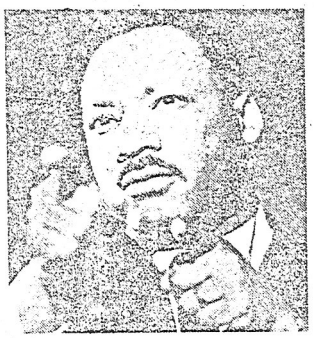
Some members of the committee consider the report irrelevant to the circumstances of the King murder. "There is nothing in the Justice Department report which bears significantly on the evidence of the case which points toward a conspiracy," said Walter Fauntroy, Democratic delegate from the District of Columbia and chairman of the House subcommittee investigating King's slaying. "The information that we have already developed clearly shows that the assassination of Martin Luther King could not have been committed by a single individual."

Critical to the events on the day of the assassination was the withdrawal of all security elements which protected King. Besides the black detective, Ed Redditt, the four-man security team provided by the Invaders (a youth group penetrated by the FBI) was withdrawn and, according to the Justice report, a special four-man Memphis security detail was withdrawn the day before the assassination.

The defense argues that a conspiracy was involved in the assassination. This suspicion has not been laid to rest by the Justice Department report. Prior to its release, Atty. Gen. Griffin B. Bell cautioned that the report left important questions unanswered, including the possibility of a conspiracy.

"THIS REPORT is fashioned in terms of assessing the job . . . that the FBI did," Bell said. "It's not designed to reach a conclusion of (a conspiracy). If you read the report you could lean to either side of it. You could say that there's no evidence of a conspiracy but you could still wonder . . . if there happened to be a conspiracy."

This week Bell returned to the question of Ray's finances and seemed to renew the question of conspiracy. He said that he or a top aide should question Ray about the source of money he used to escape.



MARTIN LUTHER KING
. . . harassed by FBI.

JAMES EARL RAY
. . . who paid for escape?

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